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SUPPLYING OF PARTISANS BY SOVIET AIR UNITSTABLE OF CONTENTS

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Command and Control

Even before the outbreak of World War II the Soviets were carefully preparing for Partisan operations, at first within the sphere of activity of the NKVD. In their organization plans they included the use of the Air Force for feeder and supply purposes.

During the war the Red Army took over control of the Partisans and coordinated their activities with warfare at the battlefield.

Marshal Voroshilov was named as Chief of the Central Staff in Moscow for the Partisan movement. Under his leadership Partisan warfare was systematically developed and became a rigidly organized weapon.

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Despite his successes, Voroshilov's place was subsequently taken over by General Ponomarenko.

Control of air operations for supplying Partisans was for the most part directly by the Central Staff of the Partisan movement. It was not definitely determined whether all requests for supplies were transmitted to the Central Staff or whether higher Partisan staffs cooperated independently with units of the Red Air Force.

To secure smooth cooperation, liaison officers of the Red Air Force and of the Long-Range Bomber Command were attached to the Central Staff of the Partisan movement.

Objectives of Supplying Partisans

The flights generally served the following purposes:

1. Supplying Partisans with materiel and medical supplies

Despite their innate ability to improvise, the Partisans could obtain the necessary means of warfare from the areas which they held only to a limited extent; they were dependent on outside supplies. They received the following supplies from Russian rear areas:

- a. Arms (rifles, pistols, machine guns, submachine guns, mortars, light armor-piercing weapons and guns in dismantled condition, such as 76-mm guns of divisional or regimental artillery units, 45-mm AT guns, and spare parts for weapons)
- b. Ammunition
- c. Explosives for sabotage purposes
- d. Motorcycles
- e. Fuel
- f. Radios, batteries, spare parts
- g. Saddles and leather equipment
- h. Poison (for contaminating food, grain, and for assassinations)
- i. Food (concentrates, canned food, flour, salt, etc.), additional supplies for state holidays, Makhorka (Russian tobacco), gift parcels of food
- j. Bandages and medicine for fighting epidemics (typhus and spotted fever). Also medical personnel was flown in by air.
- k. Propaganda material

1. Mail, strictly censored and carried by the Red Army Mail Service

2. Furnishing replacements and exchange of personnel

- a. Most of the troops flown in were members of the Airborne Troops, with training as noncommissioned officers, rigorously Communist-indoctrinated and therefore especially suitable for increasing the fighting efficiency of the Partisans.

Besides, for morale-building purposes, regular training personnel from the officers' and noncommissioned officers' corps of the Red Army were attached to the Partisans since their training was subject to regular supervision by officers of the Red Army.

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A small number of the replacements was made up of sabotage and reconnaissance personnel. The Partisans were also supplied with radiomen, technicians, doctors, and nurses.

b. On the return flight the supply aircraft took along, among others: wounded partisans; Russian PW's who had escaped from German captivity; Russian aircraft crews who had parachuted and reached the Partisans; important German prisoners (Air Force personnel) who were to be interrogated at higher rear-area headquarters.

The supply flights also served for exchange of personnel. Partisans who had performed especially meritorious service were taken to Soviet territory to rest and to receive decorations; propagandists and higher officers, who visited the Partisans to improve morale and to issue decorations, were returned home.

According to reports, aircraft also supplied the Red Army with recruits who had been drafted by the Partisans.

3. Courier service

A regular courier service was established for transmitting important messages from the Partisans to the headquarters and vice versa. This was to ensure liaison between Partisan units operating separately and for transmitting reports by intelligence agents.

4. Dropping of agents

Supply flights were of special importance for the Soviet Union's intelligence service. The Soviet high command integrated the Partisans into its intelligence service to a constantly greater extent. Reports received were forwarded by air to Russian evaluation centers, either individually or in batches, depending upon the degree of urgency.

Captured documents also indicate that detailed intelligence reports were to be submitted monthly by air to the Chief of the Partisan Staff.

Units Employed in Supply Operations

With integration of the Partisans into the Red Army, support from the Air Force was greatly increased.

The following units were employed in this operation:

1. Air Transport regiments of the Civil Air Force (especially the 1st Transport Division, with the 1st, 2d, and 3d Transport regiments, flying LI-2's and C-47's, stationed at Vukovo, 25 kilometers southwest of Moscow).

2. Units of the Long-Range Bomber Command (mainly the VII Corps, with the 1st and 12th Divisions and their regiments 101st, 102d, 12th Guards, 110th, 334th, and 338th, flying LI-2's).

3. Night-fighter regiments, flying U-2's, were used for supply flights when necessary.

4. Special courier and liaison flight groups, assigned to individual sectors of the front and which could be employed for courier flight operations.

5. According to requirements, special groups were employed at different sectors of the front; their task was exclusively supplying of Partisans. These groups were usually equipped with aircraft of types U-2, R-5, and occasionally also YAK-6's. Their strength varied, but was generally about one squadron.

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6. Glider regiments, e. g., the 2d Independent Glider Regiment of the Airborne Troops.

Aircraft Types Employed

Depending upon the purpose, the following types were used: U-2, R-5, IL-2, C-47, YAK-6, IL-2, IL-4, cargo glider A-7, hydroplane MEK-2. The PE-2 aircraft was reportedly also used for Partisan supply flights.

a. U-2 and R-5 aircraft were widely used at the front. A U-2 can land and take off on very small grass plots in forests. They were used therefore as flying ambulances, with makeshift litters mounted underneath the wings. There was also an ambulance U-2, whose rear cabin had been lengthened, allowing the transporting of one litter patient or two ambulatory patients.

b. IL-2's and C-47's were used to transport heavier cargo and to drop agents far behind the lines.

c. Ground attack aircraft units (IL-2), used for Partisan missions, dropped supplies during low-level flight over hollows.

d. Cargo gliders were regularly employed, towed by SB's or IL-4's. The most widely used type was the cargo glider A-7.

Description of the A-7

Fuselage and wings are of all-wood construction, with fabric covering. Span, 19 meters; length, 11.5 meters.

Cargo space is accessible through two doors folding inward. Dimensions: width, 1.6 meters; height, 1.2 meters, length, 4 meters.

It carries the following instruments: compass, rate-of-climb indicator, altimeter, air-speed indicator, turn-and-bank indicator. The left center section of the wing carries a landing searchlight.

Landing gear is retractable.

Performance: capacity, 850 kilograms payload or six men with equipment (without pilot); maximum speed, 300 kilometers per hour.

One captured cargo glider was loaded with TNT packed in 25-kg wooden crates, in which the explosive was packed in plates of 200 grams each. The total weight was 800 kilograms. The crates were nailed together with wooden strips to form a solid block.

After landing the gliders were usually burned. Only the instrument panel was removed.

Employment during missions: Up to the front lines the altitude was 2,000 meters on the average, at an average speed of 200 kilometers per hour.

The cooperation between towing aircraft and glider was often deficient. Misunderstandings during the release operation were common, so that faulty landings resulted and the Germans often succeeded in capturing gliders.

Communication between towing aircraft and glider was carried out by light signals. In one specific case the following signals were agreed upon: one signal when flying over the main line of resistance and shortly before reaching the target, two signals for release. Signals were also established in case premature release became necessary during an emergency.

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e. Where the missions could not be flown by land aircraft, such as in swamp or lake regions, the hydroplane MER-2 was used. It was also used during the winter.

Method of Executing Supply Flights

1. Preparation

It is not known how much time elapsed between transmitting a request by Partisans and ordering the flying unit for the mission. The unit usually received its orders only a short time before the mission.

In cases of large-scale supply missions by units stationed fairly far behind the front, a specially established group or an entire unit was frequently transferred temporarily to an air base closer to the front. In these cases, the mission commander usually received his orders directly from Moscow. Information about the enemy was supplied by the Air Army of the sector. Large-scale missions were frequently under personal command of high staff officers of the Red Air Force.

Units used exclusively for Partisan supply missions generally had the most important supplies stored at their air base. This guaranteed performance of the mission without delay.

Because of the high degree of secrecy imposed, crews were given details on the Partisans to be supplied, type of cargo, etc., only when absolutely necessary.

The crews were given the target usually 1-2 hours before the mission. One or two alternate targets were given in case the dropping point could not be found. If the crew was familiar with the area in which the mission was flown, no definite flight route was set. Otherwise the route was prescribed. Frequently a considerable detour was made to shorten the part of the flight over areas covered by the enemy.

2. Approach

The altitude depended upon the types of aircraft used. In general, the main line of resistance was crossed at very high altitude, and the altitude was not decreased until shortly before the target was reached. Missions were flown almost exclusively at night, preferably on dark nights. One captured map showed that, occasionally, approach lanes, marked by two open fires, were used during the approach into the Partisan sector. Sometimes the target was to be approached from only one specified direction.

As a rule, missions were flown every night, weather permitting.

3. Marking and lighting of landing and dropping fields

a. Marking

Partisan airfields were usually marked for the nightly supply mission by open fires. Great piles of wooden stakes were lighted and they were often placed in holes to prevent their being visible from the ground. Then the aircraft approached, pine needles were thrown onto the fire so that it would flare with a white light. If there was danger of discovery, only twig or straw fires were used, so that they could be extinguished quickly in an emergency.

Arrangement of the fires served as identification of landing fields. Arrangement was changed daily.

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D. Lighting

Only rarely were fires arranged in such a way that they lighted the landing strip. Frequently the Partisans were informed by radio of the arrival of the aircraft. Then piles of wood were lighted early enough so that the aircraft could recognize the field from a distance. During landing the aircraft illuminated the field with their searchlights.

If the Partisans felt threatened by German troops, fires were lighted only after the approaching supply aircraft had dropped a recognition flare. The fires were put out immediately after the landing.

Crews were instructed to note exactly the number and arrangement of fires. If there was the slightest deviation from the prearranged identification, the cargo was not to be dropped.

The following arrangement of fires were observed for identification of Partisan airfields: four to six fires in a row; four fires arranged in a rectangle; four fires arranged in the shape of a diamond; four fire markers at the ends of the landing area; four fires arranged in the form of the Russian letter "G", or the German letters "L" or "T"; three fires, supplemented by three additional fires after the aircraft had dropped a green flare; five fires, four arranged in the form of a square, the fifth in the center of the square; woodpiles arranged in a circle or a semicircle.

Cases were also observed where small additional fires were lighted next to one of the fires, when the aircraft approached, according to prearranged instructions.

Cargo dropping points were marked by fires principally arranged in north-south direction. The aircraft indicated the dropping of food or ammunition containers by showing red or green signal lights.

Special arrangements of fires were set up for parachute drops of personnel.

Partisans laid out signals on the ground for daylight landings.

4. Dropping cargo, parachuting personnel, landing on Partisan airfields

a. Dropping cargo

The most widely used method of supplying Partisans was cargo dropping. The dropping altitude varied with the type of aircraft employed, being about 100 to 150 meters with the U-2, and about 500 to 600 meters with the IL-2.

Cargo was dropped in specially made sack-shaped containers. They were about 3 meters long, 75 centimeters in diameter and about 120 kilograms in weight. They were equipped with a weight and a pillow on the bottom to soften the impact. The folded parachute was attached to the top.

IL-2's and C-47's carried out the dropping as follows:

When the aircraft was above the dropping site, the entire crew excepting the pilot, went to the rear of the cabin, opened the cargo doors, and waited for the signal from the pilot to start dropping the cargo. The signal was the sustained blowing of a horn. Dropping was continued as long as the horn sounded. The aircraft circled the field while the dropping proceeded. To enable ground personnel to find the cargo more easily, particularly valuable containers were sometimes equipped with an electric buzzer. It was reported that they could then be found easily with the aid of a special searching apparatus.

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b. Dropping personnel

According to regulations, personnel drops were to be carried out from an altitude of 300 to 400 meters. Nevertheless, errors were common and resulted in injuries (mostly leg fractures).

c. Landings

Landings were carried out only to exchange personnel, pick up sick or wounded, prisoners, or reports, or with the supplies so fragile, heavy or bulky that they could not be dropped.

Landings in Partisan areas were mainly carried out by U-2 aircraft. The LI-2 was used less frequently, and only if suitable landing fields were available. Landing fields were usually improvised, laid out in forest meadows, etc. Choice, construction and maintenance were tasks performed by Partisans.

5. Navigation

Navigation equipment varied with the type of aircraft used. Generally it consisted of map, compass, and the RPK (homing apparatus). Radio beacons and light beacons were seldom available but cases are known where even gliders navigated by means of light beacons. The Partisan supply flights were reported to have used German light beacons for navigation to some extent.

Considering the many contingencies and difficulties connected with Partisan supply missions, experienced pilots and navigators were generally used for them.

6. Weather conditions and weather briefings

The supply missions were flown under the same minimum weather conditions in effect for missions of other nature flown by the particular type of aircraft. The missions were made more difficult because:

- a. Supply missions were nearly always flown at night;
- b. Sites for parachuting, cargo dropping, and landing were usually very well camouflaged;
- c. Partisan mission crews were seldom able to avail themselves of special navigation aids such as radio beacons and light beacons.

The urgency of the mission sometimes required its execution even under the worst weather conditions. The mission was then flown without regard for personnel and equipment.

The weather briefing of the Partisan mission crews did not show any distinction from ordinary briefings.

6. Radio communications

Radio communications between Partisans and supply aircraft were not detected with certainty, except in the case of Tito's Partisans. The aircraft, insofar as they carried voice transceivers, were in communication only with their home base.

There was, however, active radio communication between Partisans and higher Partisan staffs in Russian territory. Messages were sent in cipher.

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Enough equipment was available for radio communications by the Partisans. Requests from the Partisans for supplies and aircraft reached the air force staffs by this method, via the Partisan staffs. Besides requests for supplies, regular weather reports and prearranged identification signals were transmitted by radio.

7. Discipline and decorations

a. Discipline of supply flyers

Aircraft crews flying supply missions were not Partisans but regular soldiers of the Red Army and thus subject to its disciplinary regulations. Their connection with the semimilitary life of the Partisans often caused discipline to deteriorate.

A number of captured orders criticized this situation among the pilots, affecting enlisted men as well as officers. Drinking bouts and loose morals, delayed starts, nonexecution of orders, unauthorized overstaying in Partisan camps, were violations frequently mentioned.

b. Decorations

Besides the usual medals and decorations of the Red Army, the Partisan supply pilots received the medal "For the Partisan of the Patriotic War" after having flown a certain number of missions. This medal was given out in two classes. On its reverse it carries profiles of Lenin and Stalin, on the reverse the inscription "For Our Soviet Homeland".

The supply pilots did not have special identifying marks on their uniforms.

8. Supplying Tito's Partisans

The missions flown by the ADD (Long-Range Bomber Command) to supply Tito's Partisans were especially informative concerning the status of air supply for Partisans and the possibilities for its development.

This supply operation was carried out by the 5th Guards Division (14th and 22d Guards Regiments) of the IV Guards Air Corps of the Long-Range Bomber Command. The Division was equipped with Mitchell B-25 bombers. In these units, the best crews were combined into individual task forces.

Flights were usually carried out individually. The aircraft would take off at intervals of 3 to 5 minutes, while groups kept intervals of about 10 minutes. A lead aircraft flew in each group; in addition, the entire flight had a lead aircraft.

Details on a particular mission:

Takeoff was as soon as darkness fell; altitude was 4,000 to 6,000 meters, speed 320 kilometers per hour. Duration of the mission had been set at 8 hours.

The cargo consisted of light arms and ammunition, Russian uniforms, underwear, shoes, food, etc. Each aircraft carried 10 sacks (PDM). The number of the aircraft was written on each sack, and a list of its contents was contained inside.

The cargo was to be dropped. Landing was not ordered. Provisions were made for emergency landings in case of engine failure.

The dropping site was arranged to be near a radio beacon; in addition, identification signals were to be set up in the form of several fires arranged in the shape of a cross. The aircraft were to confirm the identification signals by dropping white flares during their approach.

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In addition, a light beacon was to spell out the Morse letter "G", whereupon the aircraft was to reply by flashing the same letter with its search-light.

[Diagrams follow]

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Signals for aircraft landings in Partisan area during the day

Fire signals for missions dropping agents

↑	Land carefully, soft landing-field surface
└	Your left landing wheel is defective
+	Do not land
⊥	Do not lower landing gear
⊥	You are ordered to land
⊥	Permission to continue flight
⊥	Your right landing wheel is defective
⊥	Land to the left of the aircraft which has just landed
⊥	Land carefully, strong ground winds

1.)	<div> <div>North</div> <div>•</div> <div>•</div> <div>•</div> <div>South</div> </div>	Expect food
2.)	<div> <div>North</div> <div>•</div> <div>•</div> <div>•</div> <div>South</div> </div>	Request battery for radio
3.)	<div> <div>North</div> <div>•</div> <div>•</div> <div>•</div> <div>South</div> </div>	Request exchange of my radio set
4.)	<div> <div>North</div> <div>•</div> <div>•</div> <div>•</div> <div>South</div> </div>	Request exchange of my radio operator

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